Mythic Tea

Kristin SURAK

KEYWORDS: tea ceremony, nationalism, Japaneseness, culture

Introduction

In the collection *Mythologies* (1957), Roland Barthes pulls together his series of essays with a conclusion that lays out an account of myths and the way they work. Myths, for him, are semiological systems in which a sign connects a signifier and signified, giving meaning, or signification, at the level of social order above the purely linguistic.[1] To illustrate this operation, he famously turns to the cover of a *Paris Match* issue emblazoned with a black youth in a uniform saluting the French flag to argue that it is French colonialism that makes sense of the otherwise incongruous image. In this maneuver, the concept (the French Empire) drains the form (the saluting youth) of his history or biography. Personal details -- who he is, where he from, how he grew up -- are suppressed, though not entirely erased, as the French empire fills the spaces and nourishes the image with a new set of meanings that make immediate sense of the array.[2] The background of French colonialism becomes a mere statement of fact as it transforms history – the social specificity of the connection between the boy and the French empire – into nature. Myths, as such, are "depoliticized speech" (169). They make the connections they forge appear "innocent," or "natural and eternal" (169-70), and impose an economical clarity that dispenses with the complexity of the social.

With Barthes as the point of departure, I would like to examine the ways that objects, their arrangement, and their use in action can invoke myths that de-politicize and neutralize controversy. The subject of this exploration will be a public tea ceremony staged at Yasukuni Shrine and how the material arrangement of the tea performance evoked themes that contributed to the legitimation of a stained history of Japanese imperial aggression fought under the banner "Asian universalism." While Barthes makes no clear distinction between the ways that objects, actions, or texts serve as signifiers for myths based on whether they appear alone or in an ensemble, my analysis will focus in particular on how the meanings attributed to objects in their singularity collude with those of objects constituting a set – a second level of meaning, *sui generis* – to vivify a myth that depoliticizes a potentially controversial situation.

---

[1] For Barthes, this is a semiological system of a second-order, in which the signifier itself is prefigured as a sign linking a signifier and a signified in a linguistic system.

[2] A continuous oscillation between form and concept Barthes describes as a sort of "hide-and-seek" or a "turn-style" movement enlivens both, yet the myth itself obscures this movement. The myth "stiffens," "freezes," and "vitrifies." And in so doing it appears as immediate.

As the practice, objects, and setting engaged here are likely to be unfamiliar, I will start with an introduction to both the tea ceremony and Yasukuni Shrine, go on to look at the staging of a large-scale public tea ceremony at the shrine before offering a few remarks to wrap up.

To give first a brief background on the practice, the tea ceremony can be dated back to the mid-1500s when ritual tea preparation crystallized into, essentially, a performance art of elite men who employed fine utensils and refined aesthetic sensibilities when making tea in small, salon-like settings. The Meiji Restoration in the mid-19th century undid the caste-based social order and the related patronage system supporting the tea world, yet the tea ceremony survived turbulent times through redefinition as a form of marriage preparation for women. This transition in carriers still marks the practice deeply – just over 2 million attest to doing the tea ceremony today, and about 90% are women. These practitioners participate in weekly lessons where they learn hundreds of ways of preparing tea in a strictly regulated and highly ritualistic manner. Indeed, the lessons dominate their lives as tea practitioners. Full formal tea ceremonies – three-hour affairs for around four to six guests that include a thirteen-course meal and a great deal of expense – are relatively rare, and most practitioners will attend one of these grand occasions at most once or twice a year.

A substitute, however, is found in mass public tea demonstrations, like the one I will talk about today. Held in conjunction with national Culture Day activities, community festivals, school celebrations, or memorial events within the tea world, they offer tea aficionados the opportunity to put into practice what they have learned at lessons. These public displays will attract anywhere between one hundred and one thousand guests – tea practitioners and others – who spend the day visiting typically somewhere between three and five tea performances held in close proximity. At each, the guests are divided into a group of around twenty or thirty to watch a ritual tea preparation, imbibe a sweet and a bowl of tea, and take in the particular choice of bowls, scoops, scrolls, and containers used to evoke a unique theme for the performance.

This combination of utensils, known as the *toriawase*, is the primary means for aesthetic expression in the tea ceremony. Though the refined, stately movements for preparing tea (*temae*) typically catch the eye of novices, it is the utensils that are the main attraction for advanced connoisseurs who will have seen the same ritual preparation in hundreds if not thousands of times. Their value – determined by an array of principles including age, maker, origin, pedigree of owners, design, name, and official endorsement – can translate easily into price tags of more than $10,000, and tea bowls or scrolls that are three hundred years old or more are not unusual to behold.[3] Though the rarity or expense of individual objects may draw interest, this is meaningless if they are not

[3] Historically, Chinese-origin objects were employed in formal tea preparation, but by the sixteenth century these were complemented with those of local origin or from Korea or Southeast Asia, and sometimes found-objects of pleasing shape or significance (a well-water bucket to suggest freshness in summer, for example). Over time, the institutionalization of the practice, as a handful of families codified and sold tea expertise, brought with it the formation of canons of utensils deemed appropriate for the practice. Found-objects may still be incorporated – those inducted into the tea world will be subsequently housed in a special box that recognizes this new status -- but they are strictly judged according to the aesthetic standards of size, weight, balance, overall feel, and design used to evaluate canonical utensils.

selected with an eye towards harmonious arrangement that, as a whole, evokes a theme. In spring, for example, a tea scoop carved from cherry tree wood might be paired with a tea container bearing on its lid a schematic design in gold leaf of hills recalling those in Yoshino, an area made famous in a tenth century poem in which the author views its blooming cheery trees as snow. These might be used to prepare tea underneath a scroll reading "one flower opens" which an experienced practitioner would know is the first part of the Zen phrase that ends "under heaven is spring" and refers to the cherry blossom season.[4] Utensils are typically polyvalent – indeed, their cost increases with the number of meanings that may be attributed to them – and it is the context (namely their combination as a set) that does the work of determining what is meant and not meant. The hills on the tea container described above could, in another setting, suggest the distant mountains that appear in winter, or the cherry-wood tea scoop might bear the name "daybreak," and recall New Years Day or the opening lines of literary classic *The Pillow Book*. Thus the utensils employed can be seen, in a sense, twice: both in their singularity as a piece and as part of a constellation that evokes a theme *sui generis*. As such, the *toriawase* combination contributes an additional layer of meaning and value to each piece – one, of course, reliant on the background knowledge of the guests for deciphering it.

Myths at Work: Tea at Yasukuni

To see how this works in action, we can examine a public tea demonstration held at Yasukuni Shrine. Yasukuni lies not only on a large tract of land in the center of Tokyo, it also lies at the center of virulent controversy. Its name – literally "peaceful country" – belies its function as the resting place of the souls who have died on behalf emperor.[5] To date, these number about 2.5 million (the vast majority Second World War casualties), including since 1959 over one thousand Class-B and Class-C war criminals, and since 1978 fourteen Class-A war criminals, Hideki Tōjō among them. Every year on August 15 – the day of Japan's surrender to the Allied Forces – nationalists from the center to the extreme right gather by the thousands at the shrine to mourn, some dressed in kamikaze paraphernalia and carrying banners emblazoned with maps of Japan that include its former colonies. Those missing the annual event can wander through the oldest military museum in country, housed on the shrine's grounds, for a controversial narrative of the Japanese colonization of East and Southeast Asia, told as a story of brotherly aid and good will in the face of military and economic threat from the West – a defensive, not aggressive, colonization carried out under the banner of "Asian Co-Prosperity." Unsurprisingly, visits by ministers and prime ministers continue to provoke diplomatic rows with Japan's neighbors.

Yet the name "Yasukuni" literally means "peaceful country," and the Shrine's primary purpose is to house the souls of those who lost their lives in service of it – and it is this function that serves

---

[4] 一花開天下春

[5] It was founded in 1869 for the souls of those who died fighting for the emperor in the Boshin War, and elevated to the status of a shrine in 1879, when it was given its present name, taken from the Chinese *Chronicle of Zuo* (722-468 BCE).

as grounds for an annual mass tea gathering. Each autumn the Grand Tea Master (*iemoto*) of the Urasenke School (the largest tea association, accounting for around 70% of tea practitioners) offers a ritual tea ceremony for the dead. Typically 600 tickets to the event are sold, allowing attendees not only the rare opportunity to see the *iemoto* – in this case, the fifteenth generation head of the Urasenke family, named Hōunsai – in action, but also to visit three additional tea preparations (*seki*) held on the temple grounds. Organizing such a demonstration is an honor often accepted with reluctance – planning begins months in advance, about forty people must be mobilized to carry it off, and upwards of one hundred thousand dollars may be spent on acquiring tea utensils for the event – but it cements one's position within the altitudes of the tea world, and a request from the Grand Tea Master is not easily refused.

These were the concerns that Mrs. Tanaka expressed when she was invited to hold a tea performance at Yasukuni Shrine in October to accompany a ritual tea preparation by the Grand Master Hōunsai in honor of the dead. In her early 60s and a childless housewife, she filled her days with teaching the tea ceremony and attending elite tea gatherings – a hobby sustained by her substantial family wealth.[6]

A week before the event, she described to me the theme she had settled on for the occasion. On a site tour of the grounds, she was struck by a poem hung in the main shrine that the Emperor Meiji had enunciated upon his first visit in 1874. Reading the archaic and somewhat enigmatic phrase (我國の為をつくせる人々の名もむさし野にとむる玉かき), she offered an interpretation: "The meaning is that we need to become a beautiful nation," she said, borrowing the title from the best-selling book at the time *Toward a Beautiful Nation*, penned by then Prime Minister Abe Shinzō. Rather than the scroll that would be hung in the tea room, which would be the more mundane phrase "Autumn Mountain," the poem served as the central inspiration for the choice of utensils. She elaborated on the short verse section-by-section. "The first part refers to people devoted to the nation," and she went on to explain that "Musashino" captured the shift under the emperor Meiji of the capital from Kyoto to Tokyo, and that "tamagaki" was an obscure word for the fence at a shrine.[7] She clarified: "In 1874 the emperor went to the shrine and said that we need to build a beautiful nation – one that was both modern and strong. And that we need to get along with all of the people of the world. That is the origin of Yasukuni. It was only after that the other meanings were added. Yes, we ended up at war, but I think it's important to go back to the origins…. The meaning of "yasu-kuni" [lit: peace + country] is

---

[6] Years of patronizing a particularly well-positioned utensil dealer gave her access to an exclusive market of antiquities that only rarely appear in shop windows, but with a limited budget, she had to be careful with her selections, made in consultation with the dealer. He suggested a Goryeo Dynasty (918-1392) Korean vase in butter yellow to be used as a water container. Broken and repaired, it was appropriate for the withering weather of autumn, and its strikingly curved top earned it the name "Eboshi" (hat of a Shinto priest), which Hōunsai had written on the box. This served as the anchor around which the other selections were made, with an eye to visual contrast and balance, symbolism, origins, and – with a personal budget of about $100,000 for the occasion – cost.

[7] Her sister-in-law, who was helping with preparations, checked her understanding: "So it means that we need to increase the number of people who are devoted to the country so that it will become beautiful." Mrs. Tanaka swiftly modified the summary: "Yes, but the point is that it's no longer just in Kyoto but in the Tokyo area too."

peace. It's about everyone in the world building peace together."[8]

During the actual tea performance a week later, she would restate elements of this explanation, sometimes in modified form but always with reference to the emperor Meiji's poem, for the rounds of guests who would attend the gathering – 600 in all, divided into audiences of fifty for each of the twelve performances. But as Mrs. Tanaka's voice barely carried across the room even with a microphone,[9] many would have to rely on the utensils and their combination to decipher the theme of the performance.[10]

From the poem, she derived the dual emphasis of the gathering: Yasukuni Shrine and tea from Asia spreading peace throughout the world. Anchoring this connection on the other end was the Grand Master Hōunsai, who would be preparing the ritual tea for the enshrined souls (*kencha*), and who had been a great promoter of the tea ceremony overseas during the four decades of his tenure as the formal head of the Urasenke clan, and remained active in this capacity after retirement in 2003. Under the banner of "peacefulness through a bowl of tea," he traveled abroad regularly to promote the practice, performing the ritual for heads of state, establishing branches in dozens of countries, and founding training schools for foreigners. Elevating the centuries-old phrase "harmony, respect, purity, and tranquility" into a guiding principle of tea practice, he declared these ideals to be simultaneously Japanese and universal. Tea, so the story went, had its origins in China, but was refined in Japan into a spiritual path that anyone may tread. As such, competence in the arcane behavioral rules or principles of connoisseurship that structure the practice are only secondary; anyone in world who recognizes "harmony, respect, purity, and tranquility" in drinking a bowl of tea has grasped the essence of the practice, which is peace.[11]

The **individual objects**, their **combination as a set**, and their **deployment within the room** were all mustered to express this double theme of Yasukuni and spreading world peace through tea though a nuanced bifurcation. The concrete, here-and-now references to the shrine and its founding poem could be read from individual objects – the water container named after a Shinto priest's hat ("eboshi"), the tea bowl bearing a schematic rendering of a fence at a shrine, the tea container

---

[8] She went on to say that the theme could be summed up as "kencha (*ritual tea preparation*), Yasukuni, and Hōunsai. And 'Yasukuni' means 'peace'." This theme reappeared in her selection of the trays for the sweets and the incense container. She explained that the incense container was of Chinese origin and featured three children playing together. "It's supposed to be an image of peace." The trays for carrying out the sweets were also an unusual – a collection of pieces from the US, Italy, and Mexico she had bought when attending large tea celebrations in each of these countries, marking the foundation of tea branches in each of these countries. "They represent spreading world peace through tea," she explained.

[9] In one of the sessions, the main guest, a man with a resonant voice, himself a utensil dealer, repeated her explanations as he kept the conversation going so that rest were sure to hear.

[10] As is typical at tea gatherings, the interpretation would begin in the waiting area, where the guests could read a list of the utensils to be employed in the tea preparation that noted any remarkable points such as utensil name, origin, or maker in exquisite brush strokes. Deciphering the connections among the utensils would begin here, but not be complete until supplemented by their visual and tactile experience in tea preparation.

[11] As the projection of universalism was used to justify overseas expansion, unsurprisingly Japanese are typically held to a higher standard of mastering the fine details of comportment and connoisseurship, while non-Japanese can get by with simply recognizing Zen-like ideals.

decorated with an image of a moon over long grass – an combination known as "musashino" or the antiquated term for the Tokyo area employed in the emperor's poem. The presentist focus of the name of the tea scoop – "sokkon" (here and now) – drew attention to the Yasukuni location. Other implements in attendance – the scroll, the kettle, the kettle lid holder, etc. – conveyed generic autumnal valences that formed an appropriate, featureless background for the October performance. Against these bland seasonal references, it was the work of single objects, rather than their combination, to express the Yasukuni theme, a task undertaken relatively directly and concisely through their names and design.

The Yasukuni motif could have easily been a controversial one. Previously Prime Minister Jun'ichirō Koizumi visited the shrine on August 15 and provoked immediate condemnation from the South Korean and Chinese governments, which had already suspended summits with Japan in connection to the shrine visits. Large street demonstrations by Japanese demanded the end of such official calls. His successor, then Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda, had capitalized on this negative reaction by making the campaign promise a few months before never to visit the shrine.

Yet these dubious associations and bellicose origins – let alone the revisionist history of Japanese colonial expansion in the name of "co-prosperity" – garnered little attention or discussion among the attendees of the tea gathering. They lay sidelined by a narrative stressing the "peaceful" intent at the shrine's foundation, and the diffusion of this value through the spread of the tea ceremony across the world. This more abstract theme was expressed less directly than the first, through the arrangement of objects in space. Aiding in this endeavor was the architecture of the room, which was not a standard tea space of narrow measure, tatami mat floors, clay walls, paper doors, and low ceilings, but rather a banquet hall with tiled floors, high ceilings, and large glass windows. Typically in such a setting, tea would be made not kneeling on the floor, but sitting at a table, in a more informal variant of the preparation ritual. But in this case, an ersatz tea room, missing two walls, was erected for the occasion, creating a more formal, if makeshift, "traditional" space inserted within standard "modern" room.[12]

Gathered into the ersatz room was a selection of objects from neighboring countries that were to convey the Asian origins of tea – a thirteenth century Korean jug served as a water container, an antiquated Southeast Asian pot held the flower arrangement beside a small incense box, lacquered in a "Chinese" (*karamono*) style. Here, the origin of the utensils, rather than their names or explicit motifs, conveyed the theme. Indeed, this was the only possibility as foreign designs typically become domesticated once they enter into the canon of styles appropriate to the tea ceremony.[13] The butter-

---

[12] Though adjustments to dictates of "Western rooms" (*yōshiki*) are common, the element of "making do" did not go unnoticed. One of the tea experts helping with the session lamented the make-shift arrangement: "It's really too bad that it's not a tatami-mat room (*zashiki*). It's a shame to put such good tea bowls on tables."

[13] Examples include the Indian-origin cloth designs – but only those bearing figures reproducing those housed in the Shōsōin collection – that have become a standard option for cloths in the tea room, or the ancient Korean rice cups, impressed with patterns of white flowers and hatches against a grey background, that were incorporated into the standard repertoire of tea bowls. Once a part of the canon, no longer will any old Korean pot make for a good tea bowl: only flowers and hatchings of a particular type, conforming to the standards of the tea world, will do.

yellow Korean pot, dating back more than seven centuries, was no longer a container for dry goods but of water – a task it took on reluctantly, threatening to crack if forced to do so for too long. In becoming a tea utensil, as Barthes might describe it, details of the pot's biography were suppressed as the tea ceremony drew out its provenance and aesthetic form as the defining characteristics that made sense of the jar – that gave it meaning and purpose in this context.[14] All the Asian objects, selected based on tea standards and remade by their inclusion in the performance, were domesticated by the tea world. If individually incorporated into a tea display, their origins would have been only of passing note, but their combination – their arrangement as a set – in the performance at hand invoked the theme, *sui generis*, of the Asian origins of tea.[15] Yet not without further distortion. "Chineseness," "Koreanness," or "Southeast Asianness" were at once reason for their presence, yet simultaneously tamed by it – even in the terminology for their origins. Not the standard country terms of "China" (*Chūgoku*), "Korea" (*Kankoku*), or "Southeast Asia" (*Tōnan Ajia*), but a more oblique set of descriptors commonly used in the tea ceremony – *karamono*, *kōrai*, and *nanban* – declared their provenance on the list of utensils on display in the waiting room and in the conversations surrounding the tea preparation.

With the arrangement of Asian artifacts concentrated around the tea preparation, the dissemination of from Asia, bringing around the world, was conveyed through the trays carrying the small sweets consumed before the tea. In a formal tea ceremony, sweets are brought out from the back areas and served by the host before the ritual preparation begins, but in this case they were passed around by kimono-clad helpers emerging not from the (in effect) kitchen door but from behind the ersatz tea room. The guests of honor were treated to a porcelain bowl brought from China to the Tenryū Temple in the fifteenth century. Occasionally in her explanations, Mrs. Tanaka reminded guests that Tenryūji carried out many missions to the Ming Court, resuscitating an image of greater Asian exchanges, though one that obscured the rocky history of conflict between the two political orders that gave Tenryūji a near monopoly on trade.[16] Following the lead of the Chinese dish that had resided in Japan for over six centuries was a cluster of much newer platters. These too would be drained of their individual history as the thematic narrative of the tea demonstration explained their presence (airport souvenir shop origins went unmentioned). The dishes hailed not from a random array of countries, but the United States, Mexico, and Italy – homes to thriving tea ceremony associations that Hōunsai had established decades before. Most tea practitioners would be well aware of this background as in recent years grand anniversary celebrations had been held in each of countries to great fanfare – festive galas

---

[14] The tea ceremony simultaneously promoted the pot beyond its origins as a mere dry goods container of little interest beyond its age, and once it obtained the signed box that transformed it into a tea utensil, its market value would double at least.

[15] When, for example, Mrs. Tanaka used the Korean pot to hold water later for a short tea service to an antiques dealer, she emphasized only its age and unique shape, rather than a distinctly "Asian" valence, in her description of it.

[16] Left unmentioned was the political and economic significance of – and conflict surrounding -- the contact, a rather more rugged history. The Ashikaga Shogunate refused to submit to Ming suzerainity, and trade between the two lands was forbidden. Tenryū Temple subsequently arranged for China to appoint its abbot and in exchange served as a conduit for the transfer of goods, gaining a near monopoly on trade between the two countries.

commemorating Hōunsai's program for spreading "peacefulness through a bowl of tea." This spread was the accomplishment physically invoked as the "foreign" trays fanned out around the room.[17]

With two themes – Yasukuni Shrine (read from the names and images on individual utensils in the ersatz tea space) and the spread of tea from Asia, bringing peace throughout the world (expressed through the arrangement of objects as a set and their physical dissemination across the room) – had a somewhat more complex structure than at some tea gatherings. And one with consequence. The layering, in effect, muted the controversies swirling around Yasukuni, as the Barthian myths worked to defuse and depoliticize, giving "innocence" to the relationship between signifier and signified. Whether or not this altered the perceptions of the participants is difficult to judge, but it meshed with the reactions to the occasion. When I asked participants what they thought of the themes of peace through a bowl of tea and Yasukuni, nearly all responses recognized a controversial history that stood second to the asserted peaceful foundations of the place. A typical response came from a woman in her forties who explained to me, in a phrase I would hear throughout the day, "Yasukuni was built for peace – you see that in the character *yasu*. So many people gave up their lives so that we can now live in peace. The Class-A war criminals were added afterwards, which is something different. That's what puts the Chinese up in arms." She added that she felt for the people who were colonized, but qualified her statement: "But they don't see it the same. Individually I see it differently. It's all just very complicated, but I feel that we should respect those who enabled us to live in peace." Only one person – a women in her thirties who had begun lessons only three months before – expressed difficulty at reconciling the associations: "When you watch the news, you always see protests about Yasukuni and the history of the war, so I was surprised to find that the theme was 'peace.' It's a bit strange." Almost to check her response, she asked the woman beside her what she thought. Around the same age, but with a few more years of tea experience, she intervened, "For me it's not really strange. Yasukuni was originally built for peace. The other associations are really only recent."

Conclusion

Returning to Barthes, the qualities of the tea utensils, their arrangement as a set, and their positioning in space carried the dual themes of the occasion. But their collusion in this project tempered them as well. The objects' materiality, defined by their origins, aesthetic form, and patterned designs, proved to be much more malleable than their physical appearance would suggest, as the tea ceremony deftly remolded each for a new purpose. It drained the richness and complexity of the objects' individual histories and filled them a novel set of meanings, determined by the tea world, that both made sense of (and sense from) their presence. In compensation for collaboration, their monetary

[17] Where the western trays were treated as found-objects, the Chinese bowl was accorded a higher status and treated as a natural tea utensil, due not only to its great antiquity, but also to resonances with a canon built in part from objects from Ming China. Indeed, utensils of Chinese or Korean (and occasionally Southeast Asian) origin and fitting certain aesthetic standards have become incorporated into the standard repertoire of utensils in the tea ceremony that they are almost never referred to as "foreign" – a designation retained usually for utensils with non-Asian roots.

value could easily be doubled or tripled – but only if they would be confined to a wooden cedar box, perhaps taking on a Japanese name, thereafter. The tea ceremony, as such, subjugated utensils with origins quite far from the arcane ritual, while remaining dependent on them for the performance – containers from Korea, cylinders from Southeast Asia, plates from China, the US, Mexico, and Italy all produced for purposes far from the tea ritual. Though the arrangement asserted common Asian origins to tea, the objects assembled for this endeavor were ones that conformed to aesthetic sensibilities codified and canonized in the tea world.[18] As such, the broadly universalistic assertion of Asian commonality was expressed in particularly Japanese terms.[19]

Such appropriation was evident in an additional presence – beyond that of the objects – in the tea space: my own, as a white American joining three Japanese as the team designated to prepare tea. This duty was rotated among us over the course of the day, but I was singled out to prepare the beverage when Hōunsai arrived. Wrapped in a kimono and qualified as a teacher (I had received a "tea name" and permission to wear one of the Urasenke family crests), my presence stood as a testament to the success of Hōunsai's program for international dissemination, and this was continuously mentioned and duly commended. But the glowing praise didn't directly address mastery of the putatively universal ideals of "harmony, respect, purity, and tranquility" that were asserted to enable its global spread, but rather my elegant Japanese comportment and tea preparation techniques, in fitting with the undertones of cultural imperialism that marbled the occasion.[20] In raw terms, I violated the physical division between Asia and the rest, yet the transgression was only a minor offence, easily overlooked, for years of tea training had resulted in domestication.[21]

---

[18] To qualify as a *mizusashi* water container, for example, the Korean pot had to fit within expectations of size, shape, and glaze appropriate for the tea ceremony – expectations that held for the Southeast Asian flower vase and the other adopted utensils as well.

[19] Naoki Sakai captures such a movement in his discussion in *Translation and Subjectivity* of the compatibility, even symbiosis, of universalism and nationalism. Others are constituted as particular in order to establish "our" universalism, and it is through being grasped our universalism that it gains and identity through its particularity.

[20] For example, two of the session participants complimented me on how I moved in kimono: "You look just like a Japanese. From the back, you can't even tell at all since so many young people nowadays have brown hair. But you walk much better than most Japanese. Are you conscious of it?" Another offered less detailed praise, and simply applauded me as elegant. By the end of the day, I was offered an invitation to perform at an official training session in Tokyo, where an audience of around one thousand would watch a tea preparation – details projected on large screens – under the careful watch of an emissary of the Grand Master. Of course, domestication into the habitus of the tea world did not result in the erasure of my own history or biography. I would not become Japanese, but merely an impoverished version: in Barthian terms, as I became a "gesture" indexing the myth.

[21] One might note that the lauded values of "harmony, respect, purity, and tranquility" (*wa, kei, sei, jaku*) that supposedly serve as the essence of the tea ceremony were hardly at the center of the actual tea performance. A delegation from Hounsai's entourage visited shortly before his appearance to instruct those managing the tea performance in how it should be carried out: the first half of the ritual, consisting of a rhythmical and attentive purification of the utensils, said to evoke *wa-kei-sei-jaku*, was to be truncated and only a bowl of tea quickly whipped up. Little complaint arose from the audience, already seated, most of whom would be eager to share the room with the famous Grand Master. The actual performance was shorted yet further as the tea preparation dissolved rapidly into a photo shoot almost immediately after the first bowl of tea was made, Hounsai offering himself for photo ops, much to the delight of the audience.

The undertones of universalism, with distinctively Japanese inflections, could be described in Barthian terms as a myth of Japanese imperial "co-prosperity"[22] that made sense of the situation, rendered its constitutive objects into a seamless ensemble, and smoothed the experience, leaving nothing out of place. A myth, for Barthes, "purifies things, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity that is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact" (169-70). Yet these easy appearances belie the underlying transformation of the physical items that give it expression; their materiality yields to its demands as origin, form, and design are remade by the myth. If this holds for the tea gathering at Yasukuni, one might add that it holds for the shrine complex – particularly the museum – as well, justifying and justified by a similar myth of imperial "co-prosperity," in which peace results from putatively universal values of a particular Japanese kind.

（スーラック　クリステン　ロンドン・スクール・オブ・エコノミクス［LSE］准教授／
元ロンドン大学 SOAS 准教授）

[22] Reference here is to the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere," a concept rolled out in 1940 as a front for imperial control over large swaths of East and Southeast Asia.

神話作用とお茶

クリステン・スーラック

キーワード：茶道、ナショナリズム、日本人性、文化

本稿では、ロラン・バルトの神話作用をめぐる議論を出発点とし、物・その取り合わせ・その所作のなかでの使用が、論争的状況をバルトによる「脱政治化」し中立化させる神話を呼び覚ますさまを検討する。とりあげるのは靖国神社での公開の茶会であり、茶芸における物の取り合わせはいかにして、「アジア普遍主義」を掲げた日帝侵略という史的汚点を正当化するようなテーマを喚起するのか。バルトは物・所作・テクストが神話のシニフィエとして作用する場合、それが単独として現れるのか、あるいは全体として現れるのかを明確に区別していない。本稿ではとりわけ、個物に付与された意味が、諸物の集合体としての意味と結びつき、論争をはらんだ状況を脱政治化する神話を賦活するさまに焦点をあてる。

茶会において、個々の道具、それらの全体としての組み合わせと茶室内でのあしらい方のすべては、靖国にまつわる２つのテーマを表現するために召喚され、茶道をつうじて微妙な分岐をはらんだ世界平和の訴えを表現している。神殿とその創建の詩への即物的な参照は、個々の物から読みとることができる。神主の烏帽子にちなんで名づけられた水指、神社外観の図が描かれた茶碗、天皇の詩でも用いられた「武蔵野」の名で知られる草上に浮かぶ月の絵柄の茶入れ、そして「即今（いまここ）」と名づけられた茶杓は、靖国という場所それ自体へと注意を向かわせる。

靖国の物議をかもす歴史は、神社が「平和的」意図にもとづいて創建されたこと、茶道の普及をつうじてその価値が世界中に広まったことを強調する語りによって周縁化される。より抽象的なこのテーマは、より間接的に、物の空間的なあしらい方をつうじて表現される。アジア由来の多くの茶道具が茶道の所作にくみこまれているが、いずれの道具も独自の歴史をひかえながら、茶道の基準にもとづき選ばれたものである。たとえば7世紀以上前に作られた韓国の黄色い器は、本来の乾物入れとしてではなく水指として使われる。茶器になることでその来歴は抹消されつつ、茶会という文脈のなかで意味と目的が与えられ、壺としての起源と美的形式が決定的特徴として引き出される。お点前の工程のなかにアジア由来の工芸品が配されているほかに、茶の前に賞味されるお菓子用のお菓子器をつうじてもアジアから世界への普及が表現される。主賓は６世紀前に中国から交易品として贈られた茶碗でもてなされる一方、他の来賓は世界各国の器で遇される。無作為に選ばれたものではなく、茶道協会が精力的に活動するアメリカ、メキシコ、イタリアなどの国々からのものである。

靖国神社（茶室における茶道具個々の名や図柄から読みとられる）と、世界平和の表現としてのアジア発の茶道の普及（集合体としての物の取り合わせと茶室全体におけるそれら物の物理的な散種）という２つのテーマゆえに、同茶会は通常の茶会よりもいくぶん複雑な構造をそなえたものとなっている。両テーマが重なりあうことで、靖国をめぐる論争は沈静化され、バルトのいう神話作用によってシニフィアンとシニフィエの関係が脱政治化され「無垢」なものになる。このことが参加者の認識を変えたかどうか判断するのは難しいが、その反応とは符号する。茶器を通じた平和のテーマと靖国についてどう思うかと尋ねたところ、ほぼ全員が、物議をかもすその歴史をみとめつつも、唱えられている平和的創建の優位を答えたのである。